

Written Testimony of Ilicia Balaban, Issue Associate  
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Government Administration and Elections Committee

Friday, March 13, 2009

ConnPIRG is a state based, non-partisan, non-profit public interest advocacy organization in Connecticut. On behalf of our members I want to thank you for convening this hearing on the Connecticut Public Financing system and I would like to submit the following on our experiences with the legislation for the record.

### **The History**

In 2006, Connecticut adopted its public financing laws. This landmark legislation was passed two years after then-Governor John G. Rowland resigned from office following the disclosure of improper gift acceptances and corrupt practices. The public elections system, paid for by the Citizen's Election Fund, gives full public financing to candidates for state senator and state representative, as well as governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, state comptroller, secretary of state, and state treasurer. Since then Connecticut has also begun a pilot program for the public funding of municipal elections, including public financing for mayoral candidates.

The decision to make public financing law made Connecticut the first state in the nation where the legislature and governor approved full public financing for their own races. Since the bill took effect Connecticut has experienced its first general election under the new program and the results have been outstanding. Eighty-one percent of the next General Assembly are officials that chose to run under the Clean Elections program. In the Connecticut Senate, eighty-nine percent of the seats will be held by Clean Elections officials. While on the House side, Clean Elections officials will hold eighty percent of the seats.

### **Moving Forward**

Connecticut's new system of public financing of campaigns has helped to liberate our democracy, diminished the influence of special interest money, opened up the electoral process to more citizens, and enabled candidates to spend more time meeting voters than chasing donations.

In this session there are 10 bills—HB 5011, HB 5366, HB 6661, HB 6662, HB 6663, SB 604, SB 615, SB 1107, SB 1108, SB 1109—proposed that look at reducing funds to the citizens' elections program. The reduction of funding to this system would have a large impact on the effectiveness of the program and the gains we have made in empowering our citizens. For that reason alone ConnPIRG is strongly in favor of maintaining the level of funding as it currently stands. However additionally when the public financing system passed it raised the contribution limits for candidates who choose to opt out of the system. We worry that if the funding is reduced we will be left with inadequate resources for the program but standing raised contribution limits for non opt-in candidates. This will lead to increased money large dollar gifts in the system, the opposite of the bill's original intent.

Thank you again for considering our comments on the public financing system in Connecticut on behalf of our members. We think that the story of the system's success speaks volumes to keeping the program in place. We look forward to it being completely funded in perpetuity.